

U.S. HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

Committee on Agriculture

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Summary of Testimony of Paul A. Jones Ph.D.

10th President

Fort Valley State University

For

June 16, 2021, Congressional Hearing

Fort Valley State University
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Summary of testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture regarding H.R. 6020, *Funding for Student Scholarships for the 1890s Land-Grant African American Colleges and Universities Act* before the Committee on June 16, 2021.

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, I am Paul Jones, and I have the privilege of serving as the tenth president of Fort Valley State University located in the heart of Middle Georgia.

First, I would like to thank you for your leadership during these unprecedented times. The support the U.S. Congress has provided for higher education, including 1890 Land-Grant Institutions, Minority Serving Institutions, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, has been instrumental in undergirding our students financially, keeping our doors open, and ensuring our faculty, staff, and students remain safe. Although COVID-19 has presented many challenges over these last 15 months since March 2020, we have also discovered several opportunities for investment and innovation that will enhance the experience of our students and change our approach to higher education for the better. We have seen our enrollment increase despite budget challenges; we have developed partnerships with Georgia Power/Southern Company,

Central State Hospital Local Redevelopment Authority, and Ford Motor Company, as well as expanded our use of technology in our operations, teaching, and outreach.

It is an honor to be here along with my colleagues to testify in continued support of funding for scholarships for young men and women who aspire to serve our country by pursuing careers in the food and agricultural sciences, including agri-business, food production, and food distribution. Along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the land-grant system has a monumental responsibility of addressing global food security through rigorous research, extension, and educational programs. Technological advances applicable in agriculture, natural resource utilization and conservation, and food production will enable us to meet this daunting challenge, provided there is an appropriate workforce. The new 1890 scholarship program created in the 2018 Farm Bill helps us develop a highly skilled workforce, and I am happy to report we have seen significant success. Fort Valley State University awarded 76 scholarships last year, resulting in a 22% increase in undergraduate student enrollment within the College of Agriculture, Family Sciences, and Technology. All eight majors offered in the College recorded an increase in student enrollment, with the largest increase in the Animal Science Program. We believe that had it not been for the COVID-19 Pandemic and students' reluctance to being on campus, we would have seen larger enrollments in these agricultural fields.

Given our success and the report released by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Purdue University, I believe the future is bright. I also believe that this scholarship program will continue to bear fruit by consistently producing 1890 graduates who are well prepared to tackle some of the pressing challenges in agriculture and food production facing the world today.

for smaller land-grant institutions charged with a unique mission of addressing the needs of underrepresented communities and producers and landowners with limited access to technology and resources. In this context, rural broadband access will have to be our top priority to revitalize rural and economically depressed communities throughout the nation. To this end, Fort Valley State University recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Georgia College and State University's Rural Studies Institute to collaboratively work toward three distinct objectives: to enhance broadband access to rural agriculture communities, to enhance economic development in underrepresented communities, and train future leaders to bring economic transformation in rural Georgia.

This is why I was thrilled to see the President's budget include additional funding for HBCUs for infrastructure as well as the ***Institutional Grants for New Infrastructure, Technology, and Education at HBCUs Act (IGNITE HBCU Excellence Act)*** be introduced by **Congresswoman Alma Adams (D-NC), Senator Tim Scott (R-SC), Senator Chris Coons (D-DE), and Representative French Hill (R-AR)**. This bipartisan piece of legislation would be transformational in modernizing our campuses with state-of-the-art learning environments. Furthermore, this will support our unique mission of conducting applied and basic research and outreach to empower small, limited-resource, and underrepresented farmers with the knowledge and skills needed to sustain successful agricultural enterprises.

As you may be aware, FVSU had the honor of hosting Secretary Tom Vilsack, Members of the Georgia delegation, including Congressman Sanford Bishop, a member of this committee to meet

with African American farmers from across the state of Georgia. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's new farmer relief program announced by Secretary Vilsack will make a significant difference in keeping Black-owned farms operational and eventually fiscally strong. As the USDA, with your support and leadership, strives to make it a level playing field for all American farmers by implementing amended lending and subsidy policies to address food insecurity and rural inequality, 1890 Institutions can be valuable partners to help achieve these goals.

When examining ways to promote economic growth and lessen the wealth gap in rural and minority communities, access to technology and workforce development become our top priorities. It is essential that policymakers provide resources for programs that will directly flow into our communities. Increased funding will allow 1890 institutions to deploy resources and programs focused on the needs we see on the ground in our communities. The new initiatives created in the 2018 Farm Bill and the subsequent funding that this Congress has given for our new Centers of Excellence and the 1890 scholarships to increase the number of graduates in agriculture disciplines and the USDA initiative to improve the lives of minority farmers are significant steps that our nation can build upon.

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the House Agriculture Committee today. On behalf of the dedicated faculty, staff, and students at FVSU and throughout the 1890 System, I thank you for your continuous support of our institutions and agriculture.

Furthermore, this program will allow students not to be saddled with student loan debt, which is a major crisis today, particularly for students of color. I have no doubt that the number of graduates that 1890 institutions produce in agriculture-related disciplines will tremendously increase with an increasing number of scholarships awarded.

A major issue of concern to all public institutions receiving support for food, agriculture, and natural resource research is aging infrastructure and the lack of funding for maintaining facilities. A recent APLU-sponsored Gordian study revealed some alarming data, indicating a severe backlog of deferred maintenance, and the report estimated the cost to be more than \$11.5 billion. For example, the cost for updating Fort Valley State University's agriculture facilities, including classrooms, farm buildings, greenhouses, research laboratories, and support facilities, is estimated to be \$40 million. While the USDA 1890 Facilities Grant Program helps us address this issue to some extent, allocating funds for a project over a period of five years considerably slows down the progress. A timely and appropriate level of funding for improving infrastructure suitable for 21st-century science that addresses emerging issues in agriculture and food production is absolutely essential.

Emerging technologies warrant institutions to establish suitable research infrastructure and adjust their outreach and educational programming to enable them to effectively train the present and future generation of agriculture workforce and the farming community. There is an imperative and urgent need for institutions to build the capacity to handle huge volumes of data and at the speed and frequency with which they are being collected. This is particularly critical

Paul A. Jones is the 10th president of Fort Valley State University.

Recognized for being a visionary leader and strategic thinker with an extensive background in higher education. With nearly 35 years of higher education experience, President Paul Jones was appointed to take Fort Valley State's helm in December 2015 following a career that included leadership positions in Georgia, Colorado, Maryland, and Utah.

Dr. Jones, an astute and affable administrator who is committed to the transformative power of higher education, has spent the last several years advancing FVSU's standing as one of the nation's most respected institutions of higher learning; including its consistent ranking as the top public historically black college and university (HBCU) in Georgia by U.S. News and World Reports.

Before joining FVSU, President Jones served two years as interim president at Darton State College (2013-2015) in Albany, Georgia. Throughout his higher education career, he served in numerous senior leadership roles at Georgia College & State University (2002-2013), including senior vice president for finance and administration, vice president and chief of staff, vice president for institutional research and enrollment management, and several interim roles including interim vice president of academic affairs and president. President Jones was also a Professor of Educational Administration at Georgia College.

In 2019, President Jones established a university-wide steering committee to begin an inclusive and collaborative comprehensive strategic planning process to chart the University's next five years. This 2020-2025 plan, *Unleashing 21st Century Innovation, Transformation and Excellence*, is currently in the implementation phase and will focus on four priorities: Exceptional Student Experience, Operational Excellence, Organizational Identity, and Engagement and Collaboration.

During President Jones's stabilizing tenure at FVSU, he expanded the academic offerings on the campus and online, bolstered innovative programs focused on student success, and renovated and modernized aging campus structures. He also has increased retention and graduation rates, and FVSU experienced its highest enrollment since fall 2013.

During his investiture, President Jones launched a needs-based campaign to support students. Since its establishment, the program has dramatically increased funding for need-based aid. During this same period, FVSU also experienced consecutive years of increased fundraising and new donors. Under his leadership, several renovation and construction projects have also been completed or are underway, including the Junia J. Fambro Dining Center, Amphitheatre, Center for Agribusiness, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the Davidson Hall, and numerous other essential projects.

Dr. Jones is also a member of several boards including, The Medical Center of Peach County, Navicent Health Board of Directors, Fort Valley State University Foundation, Middle Georgia Goodwill Industries Education Committee, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Council of 1890s Officers, USDA-1890 Task Force, Museum of Aviation Foundation Board of Governors, and the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Executive Board.

Dr. Jones and his wife Sylvia were named 2012 Alumni of the Year at Utah State University, where President Jones earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. The Los Angeles, California-native also earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree in education and human resource studies from Colorado State University. In 2007-08, President Jones served as an American Council on Education (ACE) Fellow at the University of West Florida.

President and First Lady Jones have two adult children: Isaiah and Daphne.

Truth in Testimony Disclosure Form

In accordance with Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5)* of the *Rules of the House of Representatives*, witnesses are asked to disclose the following information. Please complete this form electronically by filling in the provided blanks.

Committee: Agriculture

Subcommittee: _____

Hearing Date: 06/16/2021

Hearing Title :

"1890 Land Grant Institutions: Investing for Agricultural Resiliency, Equity, and Global Impact"

Witness Name: Paul Jones

Position/Title: First Vice Chair, Council of 1890 Universities and President of Fort Valley State University

Witness Type: ☐ Governmental ☒ Non-governmental

Are you representing yourself or an organization? ☐ Self ☒ Organization

If you are representing an organization, please list what entity or entities you are representing:

Council of 1890 Universities and Fort Valley State University

FOR WITNESSES APPEARING IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

Are you a fiduciary—including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent—of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing? If so, please list the name of the organization(s) or entities.

N/A - Fort Valley State University

N/A - Council of 1890 Universities

Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) related to the hearing's subject matter that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

N/A - Fort Valley State University

N/A - Council of 1890 Universities

Please list any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government and related to the hearing's subject that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the amount and country of origin of each contract or payment.

N/A - Fort Valley State University

N/A - Council of 1890 Universities

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

☒ I have attached a written statement of proposed testimony.

☒ I have attached my curriculum vitae or biography.

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5), of the U.S. House of Representatives provides:

(5)(A) Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof.

(B) In the case of a witness appearing in a non-governmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include— (i) a curriculum vitae; (ii) a disclosure of any Federal grants or contracts, or contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, received during the past 36 months by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness and related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (iii) a disclosure of whether the witness is a fiduciary (including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent) of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing.

(C) The disclosure referred to in subdivision (B)(iii) shall include— (i) the amount and source of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (ii) the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract related to the subject matter of the hearing originating with a foreign government.

(D) Such statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the privacy or security of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form 24 hours before the witness appears to the extent practicable, but not later than one day after the witness appears.